

The Bridge

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New Jersey Department of Education



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- The Year One Evaluation Report has been released showing positive results.
- Coming this fall are innovative Blended Learning Modules to allow teachers to access professional-development training online, providing busy teachers with time flexibility and feedback after the training.
- The New Jersey Teacher Advisory Panel (NJTAP) will have an increased advisory role working with the New Jersey Department of Education's Division of Academics.
- NJ SMART trainings are now open to learn more about the use of district reports and student growth percentiles.
- Reminder: All teaching certificates are now electronic and not available in paper.

Commissioner Hespe Observes National Teacher Appreciation Week with Visit to Edison

In honor of 2015 National Teacher Appreciation Week, New Jersey Department of Education Commissioner David C. Hespe visited Martin Luther King Elementary School in Edison to recognize Stephanie Cardoso, an exemplary fifth-grade teacher, who is the current Middlesex County Teacher of the Year.

During his visit, Commissioner Hespe acknowledged that teachers and schools have the power to change lives and that each of us has had a teacher who made school exciting and interesting.

"Those teachers had a passion for what they taught and a genuine care for their students that inspired us to think deeply about the subject matter, take on more challenging work, and even pursue a particular field of study," Commissioner Hespe said during his April 7 visit.

"Stephanie Cardoso has not only been publically recognized for her outstanding performance, but also for the high expectations she has for all students. I wanted to spotlight her in recognition of National Teacher Appreciation Week, and personally thank her for all her hard work and dedication," he continued. "Ms. Cardoso has not only made strides in successfully blending technology into her instruction, but her class has done many community-focused projects, such as collecting 5,000 books for a school in a nearby community after they experienced a fire. Her hard work and dedication has led to her being named the current Middlesex County Teacher of the Year."



Education Commissioner David Hespe watches a class project in progress in Stephanie Cardoso's fifth-grade classroom.

Commissioner Hespe Addresses Review of Core Standards in a Memo to School Districts

A few weeks ago, Governor Christie announced that teachers and parents will participate in a statewide review of the standards known as the Common Core to ensure that these standards accurately reflect the aspirations that we, as a state, hold for our children. For now and the duration of the process, the current standards in Language Arts Literacy and Math are in effect.

The Governor's action provides a welcome opportunity to improve, inform and communicate our academic goals. We should always strive to provide our children with the best instruction and the highest expectations for their learning. We should also continually strive to ease the burden on local educators and school leaders as they work diligently in classrooms and schools throughout the state.

I want to be clear from the outset that standards are living and breathing documents and not set in stone. They are subject to periodic formal reviews by the State Board of Education, and they are regularly subject to informal reviews by NJDOE staff and educators in the field to make sure that the standards are high enough, clear enough and age-appropriate. We continue to support districts as they implement the standards through aligned curriculum and instruction.

This is an opportune moment in time for a review of the standards:

- o We are five years into the change process, which provides a logical time to examine the standards for improvement. Such a review should also identify areas where we should aspire higher for New Jersey students.
- o We have just completed the first round of testing to measure our progress toward meeting the standards. The data from these new tests will begin to be available over the coming months and will provide us with direct insights regarding how our students performed. This information will allow us to determine whether the standards were well-written and designed, if students understood what was expected of them, and whether our curricular and instructional practices were properly aligned to the standards.
- o The general confusion over the past months as we administered PARCC for the first time should give us pause to reflect on the need to work more closely with parents, families and communities to foster greater awareness and understanding. This review process will allow us to engage parents and families and communicate why raising academic expectations is important to their child's future and how student progress reports derived from the PARCC tests can help parents help their child.

In addition, this review will also provide us with an opportunity to identify other issues that are fundamentally important to raising student achievement, such as:

- o Teaching across the disciplines. One of our objectives from the start of the change process was to focus on the interconnectedness of the standards and how mathematics and English language arts instruction can serve as the basis for learning in the other content standards areas, and vice versa.
- o Technology in the Classroom. We need to determine whether classrooms throughout the state consistently use instructional

technology to help students apply knowledge and use critical thinking skills necessary for them to succeed.

- o Curriculum Gaps. Are there gaps in our curriculum that need to be closed, or aligned, with the Core Curriculum Content Standards? Are we adequately supporting students for STEM careers? Do the standards adequately reflect the need to prepare our students to be informed and responsible citizens in a global society?

This is not the first time that we in New Jersey have reviewed our standards over the few past decades, and it will not be the last. Our standards, as a whole, have withstood the test of time. They have evolved over time, and, therefore, these processes are best viewed as renovations – not tear-downs. This was the case when we transitioned to the Common Core, and it will be the case as we improve upon the Common Core.

This is a deliberative process that, when complete, will provide ample time for course corrections at the school and classroom levels. Until that review process is complete, our current standards will remain in place, as will our testing program and our programs for using the test data.

Once the review is concluded, we will communicate clearly and explicitly to teachers, families and school communities what has been changed and why. We will provide training resources and, most importantly, time for changes to be incorporated into curriculum and instruction. If changes are required to our testing program, those will also be accomplished in a transparent and responsible manner.

Moving forward, we will be assembling educator groups and parent groups to begin the work. We will conduct listening tours across the state. We will provide opportunities for input through online tools, including a standard by standard matrix that invites specific, detailed, actionable comments and suggestions. We hope that our educational partners will also commit with us to this work as they have done in the past as their assistance and support are invaluable.

We should always remember that our vision that every student graduate from high school college- and career-ready means so much more than standards, tests and teacher evaluations. We share a vision of developing the whole child through character education, digital citizenship, student support and intervention services, career and college counseling, career and technical education, and participation in the arts. We measure our success with a number of metrics, such as our high graduation rate, college enrollment and persistence and participation in dual-enrollment programs. Let us keep sight of our greater vision for education.

From the moment I returned as commissioner, I have been committed to shepherding this multi-year change process through to completion – based on a model of engagement, evolution, transparency, responsibility and consistency. Preparing our students for the challenges of the future is our greatest societal obligation. As our vision of the future changes, so must today's academic expectations change. Constantly reviewing, improving and communicating education are key to making this happen, and this has made New Jersey a national leader in student performance.



Year One Teacher Evaluation Report Released

The first report on the implementation of AchieveNJ released by the New Jersey Department of Education in June confirmed the expectation that the majority of New Jersey educators would earn the top two of four possible ratings.

The 2013-14 evaluation results for teachers and school leaders across the state, based on multiple measures of educator practice and student achievement, provided more detailed and personalized feedback than ever before.

The report identified some important outcomes, including the following:

- By using multiple measures, teachers and leaders receive individualized feedback that recognizes excellence and helps districts tailor support for those who need it most.
- As expected, the majority of New Jersey educators earned the top two of four possible ratings – Effective or Highly Effective. The approximately 2,900 teachers identified as Ineffective or Partially Effective will receive extra support in order to demonstrate progress over time to earn or maintain tenure.
- The report also provides evidence that the 15% of teachers who teach tested grades and were evaluated partially on student growth on the state standardized test were not at a relative disadvantage by the inclusion of this measure in the rating. Like teachers not receiving "Student Growth Percentile" (SGP) scores, the vast majority of those earning SGP scores were rated either Effective or Highly Effective. Moving forward, districts can examine growth data for trends, along with other evaluation measures, to improve decisions about individual, school and district goals.

Education Commissioner David C. Hespe applauded local district leaders who helped successfully implement the new evaluations. "AchieveNJ was very purposefully designed by educators to ensure that those impacted by these policies and activities are the ones leading that work in each district," he explained. "The lessons and data points embedded in this report are meant to assist our districts and schools as they look to learn from and build upon their initial year of implementation."

To learn more about AchieveNJ or to read the [full report](http://www.nj.gov/education/AchieveNJ), visit www.nj.gov/education/AchieveNJ.

Partnership Announces Innovative 'Blended Learning' Training Modules for Teachers

State education leaders recently announced an innovative program that will blend online and in-person approaches to professional-development training for teachers.



New Jersey Principals & Supervisors Association (NJPSA) Executive Director Patricia Wright, New Jersey Institute of Technology (NJIT) Provost Fadi Deek, and New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) Chief Academic Officer Kimberley Harrington announced a partnership to create Blended Learning Modules for classroom teachers. These will comprise a series of 25 professional-development training modules that teachers can take online. Through approximately \$1.2 million in Race to the Top funding, the NJDOE plans to contract with NJIT, which will work with NJPSA on the content of the modules.

Two of the primary features of the Blended Learning Modules include:

- The convenience of an online format that can be accessed at a teacher's leisure, without necessarily impacting classroom instruction; and
- The ability to receive feedback – either in person or through facilitated online groups. One of the shortcomings that teachers often experience with traditional training programs is that they get great ideas at a session and then return to the classroom, where they try to implement the new concepts in a vacuum. The Blended Learning Modules will provide crucial feedback so teachers can discuss what is working effectively and what modifications might need to be made.

The training modules will focus on issues such as curriculum; assessments; how to foster healthy professional learning communities; effective use of data and improving school climate and culture.

The partnership hopes to have the Blended Learning Modules available by the fall.

The New Jersey Teacher Advisory Panel (NJTAP) to Have an Increased Advisory Role

By Kimberley Harrington, Chief Academic Officer

Summer is almost upon us and my directors and I are working on plans to expand our support and services to you in the field in the coming year. You will be hearing more about these plans in the near future. Meanwhile, I want to introduce one of my new directors, Robin Knutelsky, who is currently managing the Office of Teaching and Learning Support. She has district-level experience and understands the need to stay in close touch with professionals in the classroom.

One of Robin's first projects was to gather members of the New Jersey Teacher Advisory Panel (NJTAP) which serves as an advisory group to the Division of Academics. NJTAP was created by Jeanne DelColle, a former NJ Teacher of the Year, to help implement specific Department initiatives aimed at educational excellence. NJTAP members are advocates for the profession who are respected for their experience and expertise. They provide input into the decision-making process and serve as a liaison between the Department and their colleagues in the field regarding teaching and learning.

At the initial meeting, members suggested a focus on Professional Learning Communities. NJTAP members developed a list of high-priority items and outlined possible professional learning opportunities that the division will focus on for the summer and coming school year.

Future quarterly meetings of the group will include discussions on the challenges and concerns of K-12 practitioners, professional learning, the redesign of the NJCore.org website and strategic planning.

Please watch future issues of The Bridge, as well as our Department website, for more information on NJTAP and plans for the future. We want you as active partners in our evolution so that New Jersey educators and their students remain at the center of our focus.



NJ Department of Education Trainings

NJ SMART Trainings in Use of District Reports and Student Growth Percentiles

Each year, NJ SMART provides over 300 trainings statewide through a blend of webinars and in-person professional development courses on a variety of topics. The New Jersey Department of Education is offering live and online professional development courses to help build and reinforce the skills and capacity of district personnel in the use of NJ SMART profile reports. In supplementing these trainings, NJ SMART recently launched two self-paced courses for authorized system users within the NJ SMART Help and Support Tab as an additional resource.

These courses include Using NJ SMART District Reports and Using Student Growth Percentiles.

The Using District Reports course is an online professional development workshop that was designed to help curriculum, assessment and school-improvement team leaders effectively access and analyze the data that is available to them in secure district profile reports within NJ SMART. The course outlines the history and functionality of NJ SMART and uses hands-on activities to build the skills of district leaders to more effectively access and apply NJ SMART data to understand trends in enrollment and performance.

The Using Student Growth Percentiles online course builds upon the learning objectives within the prerequisite Using District Reports course, and is designed for a similar list of participants. The course provides background on the calculation of student growth as an additional dimension of student performance and guides participants through hands-on activities using SGPs and other data to help inform planning and reflection.

Also this spring, the NJ SMART team will once again be traveling across the state delivering live instruction to registered district users. The full-day trainings being offered include:

- Using District Reports and Using Student Growth Percentiles (combined for a full day)
- Using Data for School and District Improvement Planning (full-day training).

District administrators who are interested in registering for these live courses, or having members of their district team participate in the courses while NJ SMART is in their region, should visit the NJDOE website at: www.state.nj.us/education/njsmart/training/

Space in these live full-day trainings is limited to 30 participants per workshop and space will fill quickly. Participants must register via the links provided on the NJ SMART training page on the NJDOE website above. Workshops will be offered again in the autumn and next spring, so please check the NJDOE website regularly for the updated training schedule.

News, Upcoming Events & Professional Development Opportunities



Don't forget to check out the Department's calendar of events (<http://education.state.nj.us/events/>) to view upcoming events that may be of interest to you or your district.

New Approval and Re-approval Process for Career and Technical Programs

The Office of Career and Technical Education (OCTE) is currently re-evaluating the CTE program approval and re-approval process with the goal of developing a web-based application. Approved CTE programs in the Business Management & Administration, Health Science, and Transportation, Distribution & Logistics Career Clusters were scheduled to be re-approved by June 30, 2015. Since OCTE is actively working on the design of this new application to increase efficiency and streamline components, the Department is extending the approval to operate CTE programs in these specific career clusters for an additional year, through June 30, 2016.

Districts will be notified when the web-based application is available and the revised program re-approval schedule is published. In the interim, districts are encouraged to review and enhance CTE programs in these clusters to align to current standards in preparation for program re-approval. The Career Cluster pages on the Department's website at www.state.nj.us/education/cte/career/ provide contact information for OCTE staff who provide leadership for the related Career Clusters, as well as resources that continue to be added as they become available.

The district's Perkins Grant project director will also be provided with this correspondence. If there are any questions, contact your district's Perkins Program Officer. A list of OCTE program officers and their county assignments is available at www.state.nj.us/education/cte/contact.htm.

Transition to Electronic Certificates on NJDOE Website

The Department of Education's Office of Certification and Induction's web page has been enhanced to provide information on all certificates issued to an individual, as well as the status of current applications.

All information about certificates is now available online including certificate name, certificate ID number, date of issuance and expiration date, if applicable. Instructions to view this information can be found at: www.state.nj.us/education/educators/license/tcis/instructions.pdf.

In order to make certification information available more quickly, it will appear on our website in lieu of the issuance of paper certificates. Additionally, the move to electronic certificates will save costs associated with printing and mailing, as many of our neighboring states have discovered. Therefore, after May 15, paper certificates will no longer be issued.

If you have any questions, please contact Ruth Winters at 609 292-2489.

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